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Missouri Task Force Makes Progress on Improving Care for Stroke Sufferers

Members of state's Time Critical Diagnosis Task Force meet again to develop an emergency response system for stroke and heart attack victims

Jefferson City, MO (February 28, 2008) – The Missouri Foundation for Health and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services formed a 2008 task force. The task force is based on the concept medical professionals refer to as a “time critical diagnosis.” When a Missouri resident suffers a stroke, their survival and recovery directly depends on the time it takes for them to receive treatment. Missouri, however, does not have a statewide system to ensure stroke patients receive their treatment in the timeliest manner.

This is why the Time Critical Diagnosis (TCD) Task Force came together to develop recommendations for a statewide emergency response system for victims of stroke and ST-Segment Elevation Myocardial Infarction (STEMI), a form of heart attack. This system aims to ensure these two time critical ailments are treated timely, efficiently and effectively.

Ischemic stroke is the most common form of stroke in Missouri and accounts for 80% of all strokes. Ischemic strokes are caused by a disruption or blockage of blood supply in the brain. For best medical outcomes, treatment should occur within three hours of stroke onset. Researchers estimate that less than two percent of patients who suffer this most common form of stroke receive the appropriate therapy in a time-sensitive manner. The TCD Task Force is developing a system that ensures patients are delivered to those hospitals where the right treatment can be received within the appropriate timeframe. Current problems being reviewed include the lack of recognition of stroke signs and symptoms, delays in calling 911, inconsistent protocols for assessment and transport, and fragmentation of stroke-related care caused by inadequate integration of facilities and professionals that need to closely collaborate to provide optimum stroke care.

Stroke and heart attack make up two of the top three causes of death in the state. This is why leading doctors, advocacy groups, hospital administrators, first responders and other organizations across Missouri are coming together to help reform the current emergency response system. The task force consists of more than 100 participants, and the stroke segment is led by technical advisor Dr. Scott Duff, a specialist in vascular neurology and the medical director of the CoxHealth Stroke Team in Springfield, Missouri.

“Stroke and STEMI sufferers share the need for a time critical diagnosis in order to save lives and achieve optimal recovery,” explained Dr. William Jermyn, the EMS medical director for the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. “Medical experts and state leaders are coming together for this Task Force because we all recognize the deficiencies in Missouri’s current system and the opportunity to implement changes that have the ability to impact every community across the state.”

For the past three meetings the group has discussed the unique needs of stroke sufferers and has worked extensively to develop an ideal system to address those needs. They will make their final recommendations for a state-wide stroke and STEMI emergency medical care system to the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services this summer. The ultimate goal of the system is to provide patients across Missouri with the right care, at the right place, in the right amount of time.

The Task Force’s next meeting will be held Thursday, February 28, 2008, at 9:30 a.m. at the Governor’s Office Building in Jefferson City. A fifth meeting will follow on March 18, 2008.

***About DHSS:** The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services protects and promotes quality of life and health for all Missourians by developing and implementing programs and systems that provide: information and education, effective regulation and oversight, quality services and surveillance of diseases and conditions.*

***About MFH:** Established in 2000, MFH is the largest non-governmental funder of community health activities in the state. It is dedicated to serving the uninsured, underinsured and underserved in 84 Missouri counties and the City of St. Louis. For more information about MFH, visit www.mffh.org.*

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Editors Note: The Time Critical Diagnosis Task Force is made up of state-wide Missouri stakeholders and participants from your area are available for interview. For more information on your area’s stakeholders, please contact Kelly Ferrara at (314) 991-4641 x113 or (314) 221-2251.

Attachments: The 360°/365 Emergency Medical Care System “Circle Diagram.” The diagram illustrates TCD Task Force’s ideal of a system that delivers patients the right care, at the right place, in the right amount of time. For more information, visit the project Web site at www.360365.org.